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## A MEDIÆVAL HUSBAND

The old French book of 1393, which prompts our present theme, is fitly preceded by a picture of a man and a maid seated in converse in a many-latticed room of the Middle Ages. No courtly lovers these by their seeming! Nor does the title of the volume, *Le Ménagier de Paris*, stir any lively hopes of gentle romance or of the gay craft. Ten minutes' reading shows that these pages have to do with the life of a late fourteenth-century home and with the precepts of a mediæval husband. Chivalry, which exalts only love *par amours*, deserts even a troubadour when he steps within his own gates, and sits with uncovered head, like the worthy of our frontispiece, in the presence of his own wife. Were she another man's, what a different story! And the husband of our book is neither troubadour nor knight; but he cuts the very figure which courtly love has always disdained and execrated, that of the wealthy old bourgeois, loving mastery and ever crying checkmate to his young bride. Here in the flesh we have a frosty January of perhaps sixty discoursing most solemnly to a fresh flowery May of fifteen regarding her wifely duties. And these curtain lectures of winter evening to summer morn are brimful of interest. Indeed we can hardly overestimate the value of this single-hearted and narrow-minded exposition of the old-fashioned, orthodox gospel of man's sovereignty as an instructive contrast to Chaucer's unpartisan presentation of many points of view in the numerous Canterbury prologues and tales that treat the marriage question. It is well that we should know how a lack-humor, prosaic pedant of the poet's own years—for the unknown author was in military service as early as 1358, just before young Chaucer went to the wars in France—reacted in his later time to the same maxims, texts, and *exempla* of the marriage relation that our mischievous humorist turned to the purposes of art. This smug old philistine, with much kindness in his heart and no poetry in his soul, provides us with the best possible illustration of the proper, the conventional, the traditional—what every comfortable domestic

tyrant thought and said in the days of the Wife of Bath and the Merchant.

Our book is the record of one characteristic duel of the "querelle des femmes," one bloodless battle in the war waged between the sexes since the world began. "In the days of King Rameses this story had paresis." Joseph Bédier, the famous editor of the French *Fabliaux*, points to tales at the expense of women in the patriarchal epoch, to the oldest papyri exhumed from the necropolis of Memphis, which reveal the conjugal misfortunes of Anoupou. Juvenal, writing in "the heroic age of female corruption," sends, in remonstrance to a friend about to be married, his sixth satire, which has not a little in common with Chaucer's protest and with the monosyllabic council of *Punch*, "Don't!" "A young man married is a man that's marred" becomes the stock quip of jesters of every century. But in the Middle Ages the motif assumes a fiercer aspect—a contemptuous wrath against woman, inspiring the definite dogma that women are not only inferior but evil beings, cursed with all the faults of nature, essentially perverse, ill-tempered, vain, obstinate, faithless, thorns in the flesh. "Mulier est hominis confusio" finds few interpreters so euphemistic as Chaucer, "Woman is man's joy and all his bliss." The misogynist is rampant in unmitigated libels that were popular for centuries: in the *De Conjuge non Ducenda* of Walter Map, if he be the maker of the highly spiced effusions of Golias, and in the *Valerius ad Rufinum*, which is surely his; in the *Miroir du Mariage* of Eustache Deschamps; in many of the fabliaux, those roughly merry tales in verse; and in several of the narratives of the *Seven Sages*, notably that most gruesome of world-famous anecdotes, "The Matron of Ephesus." Jean de Meung, cynical hater of women, continues, with many a jibe and jeer at feminine frailties, the *The Romance of the Rose*, so reverently begun by the devotee of the sex, Guillaume de Lorris. "Bien fol qui s'y fie!" is the text of a hundred satires. The fabulous cow, Chichevache, which feeds entirely upon patient wives, has always, on account of scarcity of diet, a lean and hungry look, while its companion, Bicorne, choosing far more wisely patient husbands as its food, is always fat and in good case. The great

Knight of La Tour-Landry, a race so exalted that it boasted the possession of a family romance, as a noble Irish house vaunts its banshee, writing in 1371 a book of counsel for his three daughters, fills many of his paternal pages with examples of women who were false or foolish or too free of tongue. Even chivalry that bows its heart at the shrine of beauty and virtue reckes as little of married wit and wisdom as of a wife's eager wishes—indeed to the knight a woman's will seems wilfulness. The Virgin, it is true, often exposes the wiles of Venus, but Mariolatry itself is reared upon an abiding sense of woman's imperfections, a firm belief, so says Henry Adams in his *St. Michel and Chartres*, that "Our Lady, in her essence, illogical, unreasonable, capricious, sweetly feminine, caring not a whit for conventional morality, will arbitrarily intercede in behalf of her sinners with a Trinity that administered justice alone." Such are the chief expositions of the Woman Question, as the Middle Ages understood or misunderstood it. Let us now hark back to our curtain-lecturer.

The suzerainty of the fourteenth-century lord of the household over his young bride suggests the rule of Molière's Arnolphe over Agnes or, as we have already noted, of Chaucer's January over May. But the third person in this triangle of very real life is no impudent young spark, no Horace or Damien. The master of this earlier school of wives, the *Ménagier*, has as his rival a figment of his own fancy, his youthful lady's second husband. Not for himself but for this fortunate Jankin of tomorrow he trains the seemingly docile mind and will of the novice. And this incredible altruism of the pompous old dogmatist is humanized by the oft-implied hope that the homilizing which are the larger part of him will not be discredited after those later nuptials. In that new estate, the lady must give to her husband's health and person the most devoted attention, for should she lose him too, she will be hard beset to find a third and will dwell forlorn and wretched. He is constantly looking at happiness through the other man's eyes, peering forward with orbs already a little dim into those early fifteenth-century days when this green girl of the middle teens will become the dutiful matron, submissive and serviceable, in another house than his.

A situation meet for comedy, but not without its saving alloy of pathos!

The husband's prologue is full of what his mastership is pleased to call "piteous and charitable compassion" upon the tender youth that he is moulding into womanhood. The child—she is nothing more—may work among her rose-bushes, tend her violets, make her hats, even dance and sing in her little circle, but she must avoid the feasts and dances of people of great estates (one thinks here of the "festes, revels and daunces" shunned by the virtuous Virginia of the Doctor's Tale). Of higher rank than he, she must never shame her blood. In as ridiculously methodical a manner as Arnolphe telling off his "maximes du mariage," he imparts the matrimonial lesson in the form of three divisions, containing in all nineteen articles! The first and most extensive of these divisions is devoted to "la salvacion le l'âme et la paix du mari"—not only Hosanna in the Highest, but peace on the little domestic plot of the earth and good will to one man! Of the nine articles of this portion of the Covenant to Enforce Peace at home, three are devoted to the service of God and Mary Mother, the fourth to the guarding of virtue as in the stories of Susanna and Lucrece, the fifth to affection for one's husband (be he I or another) after the pattern of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel, the sixth to wifely humility and obedience, as in the examples of Griselda and many others, the seventh to regard for the husband's person, the eighth to the care of his secrets, the ninth and last to the duty of diverting with all deference and tact a husband from his follies and indiscretions, as did the prudent wife of Melibœus or the gentle Dame Jehanne la Quintine.

The pompous monitor thus enters with a drillmaster's zest upon the systematic correction and chastisement of the youthful unwisdom of his "chère sœur"—that this is the darling phrase of the gay-hearted Aucassins to his "mie," Nicolette, serves only to heighten the pitiful contrast between gray ashes and the red glow of young love's blaze. Unlike Herrick our Parisian pantaloons takes no delight in the disorder of the erring lace or the careless shoestring. Kerchief and coiffure must be so point-device that no distracting curl may stray. Then as now boys'

glances were eager. On her way townward or churchward middle-teens must walk with lowered lids and eyes on earth, casting no look at man or woman and never stopping to laugh or chat with a passing acquaintance. Why not at once, "Get ye to a nunnery!" for the worthy master's doctrine seems better to befit a religieuse than a matron? With special unction he reviews the devotions of the day and embarks upon a penitential sermon, surely not of his own making, and very like indeed the harangue of Chaucer's Parson. Here are the same three time-honored divisions of Penitence—Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction—and here under the second head is the same large space, some thirty or forty pages, accorded to the Seven Deadly Sins and their opposites. The first of the Vices is Pride, whose chief branch is Disobedience—not only to God and parents, but "to my husband and other benefactors and sovereigns." Wifely disobedience is deemed so heinous an offence in the Middle Ages not merely because it is specifically forbidden in the thirteenth of Hebrews and in the fifth of Ephesians but chiefly on account of its prime place among the deadliest of the Sins. Somewhat later in his volume our old benedict offsets Petrarch's story of the obedient Griselda with the example of a wife rightly burned for the disobedience into which she was led by her pride—quite as grievous an offence this, so he tells us many times, as the fault of Eve or of Lucifer. Chaucer's contemporaries thus drew no moral distinction between disobedience to God, to King, to master, to father, and the slightest disregard of the husband's wishes—all are of the deuce, damnable. The great *Sieur de la Tour-Landry* held the same view of wifely duty; as, indeed, three centuries later, did Molière's Arnolphe, who bids the woman humbly serve her man as "son chef, son seigneur et son maître."

Shall we read no books that are not tales of love, and have no friends that are not lovers? What *lèse majesté*! The lord and master solemnly commends to the perusal of this slip of a girl the Golden Legend, the Apocalypse, Jerome's *Vitæ Patrum* and other treasures of his library—many of these doubtless as intolerable to her young ladyship as Jankin's volumes to the Wife of Bath. In the pages of Augustine and Gregory the demure

disciple will read that a worthy woman, so loyal to her husband as to have never a thought of another man, may be called a maid. Let her bear always in mind those models of married chastity, enshrined in the marriage service, Sarah and Rebecca. And then there were Leah and Rachel, too! "Without jealousy, contention and envy they left everything for their husband! How many women would live so peaceably together now under such circumstances! I think that they would fight one another. O God, what good and holy women these were!" The wife's most rapturous reading must be, of course, the love-letters of her lord, received "en grand joie et révérence"—and providing, so we should guess, much the same warm food of fancy as the *Lives of the Fathers* just recommended. She must answer in kind. The poor little bride must beware of all other men, chiefly of gay young springalds of the court, lavish of their leisure, fond of the dance and of wild living. "And trusteth as in love no man but me!" Birds and beasts of every sort, all named at terrible length, love their masters—even dogs who are beaten and stoned—hence women also should love their husbands. "Therefore I pray you," adds our over-ripe logician, "to love very dearly my successor"—"vostre mary qui sera." Most weighty conclusion!

The curtain-lecturer is now fussily concerned lest his pupil shall fail in some service of humility and obedience to her second husband. She must discharge all the commands of that potentate whether given in earnest or in sport; she must have no wants or desires that do not accord with his; she must avoid all things that he forbids; and must never question his mandates, especially in the presence of others. Nor has the woman any right to know her husband's reasons. If he wishes to disclose them, well and good, but he will do so as a courtesy and in private, never as an admission of woman's mastery and sovereignty. Like Chaucer, the old philistine feels that Marquis Walter perhaps went somewhat too far in testing Griselda's submissiveness. He is inclined to question the wisdom of robbing a loving mother of her two children during many years' space and then of divorcing her from bed and board, all this merely to assay her gentleness. He himself would hardly have done so; but he approves heartily of less severe trials, and he is quick to cite trivial tests of docility

that recall Petruchio's handling of his Shrew. Indeed, he feels that such experiments have divine sanction in that God himself tested one woman by telling her not to take an apple and another by forbidding her to look behind. Through disobedience many women have sacrificed the affection of their lords, failing to profit by the example of other inferior beings, bears and wolves and monkeys, which gladly dance and leap and tumble at their master's behest. Quite as well trained as any of these animals was that young woman of Melun who won a dinner for her husband from the Sieur de Andresel by leaping three times over a stick, whereas the Sieur's lady, a creature of blooded stock, angrily refused the jump. How much better, had she consulted her lord's honor! The husband who does not find at home perfect obedience in the smallest things as above can hardly be blamed if he finds his pleasure elsewhere.

Yet what is sauce for goose is obviously no sauce for gander. Troubled by a dull masculine fear that womanly wiles will somehow outwit him at his own game, old lack-logic inveighs against the sacrilege of those irreverent wives who test in small ways or great the affection of their husbands. There was, for instance, that outrageous young woman—"condemned to everlasting redemption" in the eighth story of the *Seven Sages*—who tried her worthy old spouse by cutting down his little fruit-tree, killing his pet dog, dragging away the cloth from the table at which sat many guests. Such excesses as these are committed by women who seek to have their own way, counter to their husband's will. If there be some special pleasure of the wife which the husband has not expressly forbidden—such oversights seem to have been very rare—the dutiful domestic subject will write to him, in case of his absence, and ask his commands, instead of following her feminine wishes. Thus the damp heavy foot of the hippopotamus tramples every young joy in its path.

Care of the husband's person includes eager attention to his every craving for comfort. Three things, as Solomon said, drive a worthy man from his home, "a leaking roof, a smoking chimney and a chiding wife" (thus, too, the Wife of Bath's old husband). But many things make him turn eagerly homeward—a good fire, fresh shoes and stockings, ample food and drink, beds warm and



white and free from pests, windows closed in those glassless days with waxed cloth or parchment so that no flies can enter. Then the sybarite waxes somewhat bitter. If women would only devote the same care to their husbands that men give to their horses, dogs, asses and other beasts—he deserves to be taken at his word—then home would seem a paradise of repose and husbands would long to see their wives, as holy men, after fasting and penance, yearn too see heavenly faces. All the deeply rooted mediæval distrust of woman's ability to keep counsel inspires the warning to guard well the husband's secrets. To curb the tongue is a sovereign virtue, and many perils come from much speech. Let the women beware to whom and of what she speaks, cherishing above all the confidences of her second husband, concealing his faults and follies but confessing to him all her own sins. Half a dozen stories of superhuman discretion support the argument.

Moreover, a woman should advise her lord as carefully as one plays a piece on the chess-board, gently and wisely withdrawing him from his errors. If this good office makes him so angry that his cruel wrath may not be restrained, let there be no complaint to friends and neighbors, but quiet weeping and prayer in the lady's chamber. One recalls Dr. Holmes's praise of the Pilgrim Mothers for putting up not only with pioneer hardships but with the Pilgrim Fathers as well. Graybeard's reaction to the story of Melibœus and his wife Prudence, the same tale that Chaucer tells on the Canterbury road, is significant. He extols the worthy woman not only because she sagely and subtly taught her husband patience in his sore distress and with timely arguments, dissuaded him from his mad intent, but because she achieved her end with such gentle tact and sweet humility as not to discredit her husband's mastery. Through haughty claims of sovereignty no woman can prevail, for there is no married man, however poor or weak, who does not will to lord it in his house. Thus the days of chivalry deferred to women!

At the beginning of the second division—the second volume of Pichon's edition—the burgess is troubled by a passing fear that his yoke may seem burdensome to young wifhood. His instructions, he hastens to assure his "*chère sœur*," are no heavier than necessity demands, if she is to become an efficient

helpmate. All the duties of woman are comprised in the love of God and the service of her husband. He straightway inserts a long-winded verse-allegory, "The Road of Poverty and Riches," full of the rules of service and the lessons of diligence and perseverance. The sting of the thing is in its tail, for the preachment ends with the inevitable slurs on women's love of praise and eagerness to have their own way. The master, who is himself a veritable monster of efficiency, now takes the girl by the hand and leads her forth into the garden. Here as within doors there is little charm—just a hint or two of Lenten and Armenian violets, which do not bear until the second season, or of majoram and lavender and gilly-flowers,—but much practical counsel on preparing the ground, sowing, cutting, and tending. One fresh from April contact with the soil finds almost everywhere sound knowledge and sense, with only here or there a touch of superstition. The wife must sow and plant and graft in damp weather, either in the evening or in the early morning before the heat of the sun and, the mediæval gardener adds, in the wane of the moon. Then much expert advice anent cabbage and lettuce, parsnips and spinach, while the child's thoughts doubtless rove to her rose-bushes! Perhaps she is wondering whether there is not somewhere some little thing that this pompous old man does not know.

When Omniscience, in his next chapter, unfolds every detail of the choice and control of servants, we become aware that his is indeed a great establishment—town-house and country mansion and, doubtless, beyond the garden-close, many broad acres. Such wealth demands three kinds of servitors: assistants for certain occasions, porters, bearers, fullers, coopers, or, for the field, sowers and mowers; yet others for certain trades, bakers, butchers, cobblers, workers by the piece; and finally domestic servants engaged by the year and living in the house. The rule of domestics this trustful husband commits to his wife—with certain reservations—"That the servants may obey you better and that they will hesitate to anger you, I give you full authority to have them chosen by the Housekeeper, Dame Agnes the Béguine, to praise them as you will, pay and keep them just as you like, and discharge them when you will—however, in every case, you

ought secretly to speak to me and act by my counsel, for you are very young and can easily be deceived. After your husband you shall be mistress of the house, commander, governor, sovereign, administrator." Nor are her duties few. She must drive a sharp bargain with new servitors, else they will become exorbitant and abusive, she must demand their credentials and record their antecedents with the aid of master John, the Spencer or Majordomo, she must keep all her household in subjection, correct and punish them, deny them all excess and riot, forbid them to lie, to play at illicit games, and to use any words which savor of villainy or dishonesty like *sanglant* (the cockneys's "bloody!"). Under the guidance of Dame Agnes she must make her servants work and rest at the proper hours, brooking no excuses and subterfuges. She must see in the morning that the entrance halls and rooms are properly cleaned and swept as befits her master's estate. And she must look diligently to beasts of the chamber, like little dogs, and to all the birds of the house, as they cannot think and speak for themselves.

When she goes to the country château, her supervision must take an even wider range. Through Dame Agnes she must commend to each farm-worker his especial charge: to Robin the shepherd all the muttons, to Josson the cattle-herd and Jehan-neton the milkmaid, the cows and calves, hogs and pigs, to Eudeline, the dairy-farmer's wife, the geese and ducks, cocks, hens, and pigeons, and to the carter or farmer the horses, asses, and the like. She and the dame must show their interest in the animals before the folk and keep an accurate account of their increase and decrease. And if she is in the country, when there is a visit of wolves—these creatures sometimes penetrated even into the streets of Paris—Master John or her shepherds must kill these with the poison here prescribed. She must guard, too, against rats in the granary with mousers, traps, and deadly recipes. Here, too, are prescriptions for removing spots and stains from linens and robes and furs before her women put them away for summer or for winter. Let her look to the care of her wines, vinegars, oils, nuts, and peas by her steward. Such is life under the ancient regime.

Dame Agnes shall assign work to the women, in chamber,

soler or kitchen, Master John to the men in every quarter, on the hill, in the vale, in the fields, in the town, each according to his place and knowledge. Idleness engenders all evils. At the proper hours seat all the servitors at their table and make them eat largely of one sort of meat and not of several dainty dishes, and quaff a single drink nourishing but not heady. After the meal do not allow them to linger with their elbows on the board, but let them return to the fields sober. In the evening, when supper is over and all are warmed and eased, bid Master John or the Béguine close and lock your hostel, so that none may leave or enter. Get reports of cellar and of farm and take care that the chimney fires be covered. Let each of the people have a candle by the bedside and let each know his work of the morrow. He who forgets nothing bids the little matron keep close to her both by day and night her maids of fifteen to twenty years, for at that age they are foolish and have small knowledge of the world—even less than she herself. And he admonishes her, should any of the household fall ill, to drop all common matters and to care for the sick with love and charity and constant thought until health returns. Despite his rôle of mediæval husband, there is humanity in the man.

In the *Ménagier* there are many other things, not all of them of the deepest interest to a girl. Indeed the wiseacre considerably bids his child-wife run away and play, during his discourse to Master John upon horses, their "conditions" or points, the same that are repeated by a hundred writers from Xenophon to Shakespeare, their ages, their care, their diseases and cures—good horse-sense, much of this, spiced with the hocus-pocus of a charm or two. And fifteen doubtless yawns behind her slim fingers while the indefatigable old man holds forth at prodigious length upon the rearing of sparrowhawks. Yet in youth's philosophy of times and seasons, horse and hawk and hound, too, have their place, no doubt. Life in the Middle Ages seemed to have been spent chiefly at table; and, in the house of our burgess, "it snowed of meat and drink." Hence the mistress of the household must know all the markets and butcher-shops of her Paris of three hundred thousand souls—the Porte de Paris, Ste. Geneviève, St. Germain, the Parvis, the Temple, and St. Martin.

She must hearken to the contents of royal larders, she must ponder over the menus of a dozen great festivals and master a hundred pages of tempting recipes. What huge numbers of beeves and sheep and calves and pigs and pullets are daily consumed in that greedy old world! What Rabelaisian repasts of eels and turbots and swans and peacocks and pheasants in their feathers with gilded beaks and claws tax the powers of these valiant trenchermen! What wines and sauces and pastries and jellies and compotes tickle the eager palates of epicures! As the young bride reads of the famous banquet tendered by the Abbé de Lagny to high officials of church and town and of the splendid marriage feast of Jehan de Hautecourt, she seems to see the spacious hall covered with tapestries and strewn with rushes, the long tables decked with exquisite napery and service of gold and silver, glistening in the light of torches and flambeaux, and everywhere at the beck of bevelveted guests scores of nimble serving-men busy with flasks and platters and with bowls of scented water. Thus it was doubtless at her own bridal, of the splendor of which all Paris must have talked.

A gently bred girl of the fourteenth century questioned her husband's right to rule as little as the modern 'Arriet denies 'Arry's perquisite of heavy-handed persuasion. Adam's sovereignty was a conclusive argument—at any rate the rib seldom demurred. Nor could our green young May have perceived that January was unconsciously shattering his whole ponderous structure of masculine domination when for just one little moment his old heart sings to this stirring tune: "Pardieu, I verily believe that when two worthy people are married, all other loves are deemed as nought and forgotten save theirs alone. When they are together they look long into each other's eyes and touch hands, without speech or other sign. And when they are apart, each thinks of the other and says deep down in the heart, 'When I see my dear one, I shall say that, I shall ask this favor.' All their chief pleasures, their highest desires, their perfect joys lie in doing each other's will; and, if they really love, they care not a whit for obeissance and for reverence but crave only everyday comradeship." The words are so unwonted that their full meaning is hardly caught by the girl, yet they chime sweetly in

her ears. And though she is well aware that the master may soon regret the outburst, and will never again utter such heresies, her heart dares hope that the other man of whom her mentor is always discoursing, "vostre mary qui sera," will often talk like that. And so we leave her musing not upon the husband of the present but upon the husband of the future,—

"Whoe'er *he* be,  
That not impossible *he*,  
That shall command my heart and me :

"Where'er *he* lie,  
Locked up from mortal eye  
In shady leaves of destiny."

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